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King applauds Chertoff's remarks on NPR

Calls homeland security oversight "perhaps the Democrats' biggest broken promise"

Washington, D.C. (Thursday, January 17, 2008)—Today, U.S. Rep. Peter T. King (R-NY), Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, applauded U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff's remarks to National Public Radio (NPR) regarding the failure of Congress to consolidate homeland security oversight. DHS is currently forced to answer to some 86 committees and subcommittees across Capitol Hill, directly contradicting a key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission which stated that there should be one primary committee of oversight in both the House and the Senate.

In a three-part interview series that concluded this week, Secretary Chertoff remarked that his Department is "often pulled in many directions, especially by Congress.... [DHS is] serving so many masters with so many inconsistent positions that it's very hard to do our job."

Even NPR itself noted that "almost everyone interviewed for this series cited as a major problem the failure of Congress to consolidate its oversight of Homeland Security."

Ranking Member King couldn't agree more.

"Make no mistake, this is severely detrimental to our national security," King said. "The more opposing directives they're given and the more time Department heads spend testifying before Congress, the less time they can spend actually implementing and improving domestic security measures."

"Despite House Democrats' repeated promises to enact all the remaining 9/11 recommendations, they have blatantly ignored this key recommendation," King continued. "The failure is perhaps the Democrats' biggest broken promise—and that's saying something."

King noted that, in a September 2007 letter, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff estimated that the Department had participated in almost 160 Congressional hearings and provided 1,793 Congressional briefings—and that was only through the first 8 months of the

year. Responding to so many Congressional requests, Chertoff said, takes Department officials away from developing, implementing, and improving domestic security measures. “Arguably the most important step Congress can take to improve operational effectiveness at DHS...is to streamline Congressional oversight,” he wrote.

King pointed out that House Democrats have already missed two opportunities to consolidate oversight of DHS—with a simple rule change at the start of the 110th Congress or as part of the so-called “9/11 bill” package.

“In the 109th Congress, Republicans took the important first step of making the Committee on Homeland Security a permanent, standing committee,” King said. “If the Democrats were truly interested in enacting the remaining 9/11 Commission recommendations, they would have taken the important next step and given one Committee primary oversight of DHS. But a year later they have done nothing—and the American people deserve an explanation.”

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